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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1791
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ULAANBAATAR 000339

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TAGS: MARR PREL PTER MG IZ PL CH RU

SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER SAYS IRAQ ROTATION DECISION TO BE
MADE BY NEXT WEEK

REF: ULAANBAATAR 325

Classified By: Ambassador Mark C. Minton, for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a June 12 call on Defense Minister Sonompil, the Ambassador emphasized that there is great interest in Washington in Mongolia's formal approval of the 8th rotation of troops to Iraq. Minister of Defense Sonompil responded that the Mongolian National Security Council (NSC) will meet on Friday, June 15, and make a formal recommendation to the Cabinet on whether to send an 8th rotation. The Defense Minister stated that the Prime Minister and Cabinet will make a final decision during the June 20 cabinet meeting. The Minister stated that despite a recent spike in mortar attacks, Mongolia supports the Coalition mission and wants to see it through by supporting an 8th rotation. In that regard, the Minister said that an 8th rotation, if sent, will have an increased number of troops and snipers. The Minister also discussed Chinese and Russian participation in Khaan Quest 07, the U.S.-supported multinational peacekeeping training exercise which Mongolia will host in August. END SUMMARY.

Washington Appreciative of GOM's Coalition
Contributions, Bilateral Mil-to-Mil Cooperation

¶2. (C) During the call, the Ambassador, accompanied by newly arrived DATT LTC Schwab (notetaker), reiterated Washington's great satisfaction with the state of bilateral security cooperation. During his recent consultations in DC, the Ambassador noted, there had been particular appreciation for Mongolia's continued support and contribution to Coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially within Congress and the Department of Defense. The Ambassador mentioned SecDef's June 3 meeting with Defense Minister Sonompil in Singapore in which Mongolian Defense Transformation was discussed. He also noted that the Khaan Quest ,07 international peacekeeping exercise preparations were going well and that US Pacific Command Commander Admiral Keating planned to visit, possibly during the exercise.

8th Iraq Rotation Encouraged;
Decision Coming Within the Week

¶3. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that there is great

interest in Washington in Mongolia's formal approval of the 8th rotation of troops to Iraq. Minister of Defense Sonompil responded that the Mongolian National Security Council (NSC) will meet on Friday, June 15, and make a formal recommendation to the Cabinet on whether to send an 8th rotation. The Defense Minister stated that the Prime Minister and Cabinet will make a final decision during the June 20 cabinet meeting. The Minister stated that despite a recent spike in mortar attacks, Mongolia supports the Coalition mission and wants to see it through by supporting an 8th rotation. In that regard, the Minister said that an 8th rotation, if sent, will be increased to 136 troops (from 100), plus snipers.

Troops Support Continuation; Public, MPs Skeptical

¶4. (C) Minister Sonompil discussed the challenge of persuading the public and members of parliament about the importance of continued support to the Coalition in Iraq and participating in international peacekeeping activities. The Minister, himself an MP, said unfortunately there were individuals in the GOM who would use politics (implying the issue of the 8th rotation) to pursue their own personal agenda. However, he knows the soldiers on the ground and those returning from Iraq overwhelmingly support OIF/OEF deployment.

Plan to Beef Up 8th Rotation Forces

5 (C) Minister Sonompil noted that the Mongolian Armed Forces (MAF) had increased the numbers of troops in previous rotations from 100 to 136 in order to reduce troop stress and fatigue. The MAF had also decided to include trained snipers in this rotation to help counter terrorist/insurgent sniper activity at selected patrol points. Moreover, during the Minister's recent visit to Iraq, he had garnered GOM support to double soldier's monthly pay to US\$600/month (\$20/day).

Coalition Pre-deployment Training) Expensive Stuff

¶6. (C) The Minister used this point to segue into the increased financial costs associated with preparing and training soldiers for OIF and other international peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone and elsewhere. Minister Sonompil commented that the GOM is still awaiting reimbursement for the training costs associated with the 6th and 7th OIF rotations (\$305,000 total) and that a portion of the UN reimbursement from the Sierra Leone mission is being used to fund pre-Iraq deployment training. (Note: The 6th rotation trained in early 2006, and the 7th rotation trained in August/September 2006.) Additionally, he stated that of the US\$618,000 the GOM set aside for international peacekeeping, MoD had already spent 70%.

Khaan Quest PKO Exercise Training Pricey Too

¶7. (C) Concerning Khaan Quest, the Minister stated that MoD was confident of the exercises success as this was the second iteration in Mongolia and the MAF is well experienced now. He did state, however, that a request to the Ministry of Finance for US\$400,000 to help fund the exercise had been recently disapproved by the Cabinet and the MAF would have to find a way to fund the exercise internally (currently, USPACOM is providing US\$550,000 to support KQ 07, approximately 50% of projected costs).

Some Progress on Russian, Chinese KQ Participation

¶8. (C) On the issue of international participation in Khaan Quest, the Ambassador inquired about the Minister's understanding of Chinese and Russian exercise observers. The Minister responded that he understood the Russian Defense

Attache in Mongolia would observe and that the Chinese would send two 3-4 man teams to observe both the Field Training Exercise and Command Post Exercise portions of the exercise (6-8 individuals total). Minister Sonompil went on to say that, with regard to the Chinese and the recent visit of the PLA Chief of General Staff, the two countries had different &points of view8 with regard to participating in and supporting international operations. However, he believed that both neighbors understand Mongolia,s desire to participate in bilateral and international exercises, and he suggested that the Mongolians will likely be invited to participate in future bilateral military exercises in China. The Ambassador said he was encouraged to hear about the discussions with Russian and Chinese counterparts and their understanding of Mongolia,s efforts to participate in international peacekeeping opportunities.

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